

The Champlain Valley Heritage Corridor Project



Report of a Special
Resource Study

National Park Service
Northeast Region
Boston Support Office
1999

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. This report has been prepared to provide Congress and
. the public with information about the resources in the
. Champlain Valley Study Area and to evaluate those re-
. sources using the National Park Service (interim) criteria
. for establishment of national heritage corridors. The report
. presents a broad summary of the character and history of
. the Champlain Valley, based on material compiled from
. secondary references and information solicited from appro-
. priate agencies and qualified individuals. It is not intended
. to represent original investigations or research, present a
. comprehensive history of the region, provide a detailed inven-
. tory of the multitude of historic sites and tourist attractions, or
. replace other planning initiatives.

.
. Publication and transmittal of this report should not be con-
. sidered an endorsement or a commitment by the National
. Park Service to seek or support either specific legislative
. authorization for the project or appropriations for its imple-
. mentation. Authorization and funding for any new commit-
. ments by the National Park Service must take into account
. competing priorities for existing units of the National Park
. System and other programs.

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Fort Ticonderoga as partially restored, circa 1909.

On July 6, 1909, during the Champlain tercentenary celebration, President William Howard Taft spoke at restored Fort Ticonderoga. This speech was given exactly 132 years after the Americans abandoned the fort to British General John Burgoyne, within days of the anniversary of a disastrous British repulse in 1758 and in the same month that the British finally captured Ticonderoga in 1759. Mindful of this accumulated history, Taft summed up the importance of the Champlain Valley, saying: “This was the passageway, and here were fought the battles contended for two hundred years, and as we may now say, never to recur.”

These battles encompassed the Seven Years (or French and Indian) War, the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and, even briefly, the Civil War—as well as the early territorial battles of Native Americans. The conflicts left behind a physical record in the great fortifications and earthworks—most notably at Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence—and in the exceptional collection of historic shipwrecks found in the cold waters of Lake Champlain and Lake George. More than two centuries of conflict and nation building in the valley finally came to an end in 1815. With the influx of New England Yankees, followed by other

immigrant groups, and construction of the Champlain Canal and the Chambly Canal, industry, commerce, and farming expanded. Tourism originated early and has grown into the region’s most visible economic activity.

In recognition of this legacy, Senator James Jeffords of Vermont requested that the National Park Service (NPS) assess the suitability and feasibility of Congress designating a heritage corridor in the Champlain Valley. A team of planners from the National Park Service Boston Support Office worked in consultation with local citizens, government representatives, scholars, resource specialists, and consult-

The Champlain Valley clearly merits designation of a national, or arguably, international heritage corridor.

ants to evaluate whether the preservation and interpretation of the resources of the Champlain Valley merit additional National Park Service involvement. This Special Resource Study uses National Park Service guidelines and (interim) criteria to determine whether a national heritage corridor or some other option would best serve the needs of the Champlain Valley. The purpose is not to convince Congress or Champlain Valley residents that a heritage corridor or some other option should be pursued. Rather, the goal is to provide Congress and interested citizens with the information they need to consider what role the National Park Service should have in shaping the future of the Champlain Valley heritage resources.

A group of 40 scholars, government representatives, resource specialists, and local advisors identified three interpretive themes that distinguish the valley from other areas of the United States. These themes are cohesive in that each tells one clear, easily understandable story and pervasive in that they represent as much of the region as possible. The first theme, "Making of Nations," emphasizes the immense strategic importance of Lake Champlain and its connecting waterways when the only practical means of moving large armies was by water. The second theme, "Corridor of Commerce," focuses on the critical importance of transportation on the lakes and rivers in the development of industry. The third theme, "Magnet for Tourism," encompasses the valley's long history of tourism and its diverse vacation areas. "Making of Nations," is represented by an existing national park and by numerous resources that have been designated as National Historic Landmarks due to their national significance. Additional National Park

Service involvement may be warranted here, since there is no Park Service unit or national heritage corridor that offers as complete a portrait of the struggles for dominion that led to the formation of two modern world powers, Canada and the United States.

The establishment of a new National Park Service unit—such as a national park or national recreation area—is not feasible due to the size and configuration of the valley, the dispersion of its resources, the diverse pattern of land ownership, and the multitude of jurisdictions. However, there are other options that would enable the National Park Service to provide recognition and assistance to the valley without becoming a primary landowner or manager. One option is federal designation of a heritage corridor; another is federal support of efforts to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's arrival in the valley. A third approach, provincial/state designation of a heritage corridor, would also benefit the Champlain Valley, but without the recognition and direct involvement of the National Park Service.

The Champlain Valley clearly merits designation of a national, or arguably, international heritage corridor. Such a designation could best be accomplished with a groundswell of local support, a willingness to reach across jurisdictions, adequate funding, and the necessary legislation. The quadricentennial (400th anniversary) commemoration could be an effective first step in developing mechanisms for multijurisdictional collaboration, demonstrating success, and even building a foundation for a federally designated heritage corridor.

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